



## Are Fisheries and Aquaculture Still Food-Producing Sectors for the European Union?

The question is opened. The French Association of Fisheries Science (AFH)<sup>1</sup> is concerned by recent signals from European institutions regarding the place they assign to the fisheries and aquaculture sector, as well as to the scientific research that supports it.

In the wake of the “Year of the Ocean” and at a time when the European Ocean Pact is taking shape, several announcements suggest that fisheries and aquaculture might no longer be considered key components of the “blue economy,” despite being widely promoted as such. While the ocean is increasingly viewed as a resource, it is above all seen as a space to be shared among multiple uses with strong economic, technical, and industrial stakes—particularly in the energy sector. It is less and less recognized as a vital source of food for our societies.

Two recent developments concerning sector funding and fisheries research are particularly revealing.

The first relates to the publication of the 2026–2027 work programme for Cluster 6<sup>2</sup> of Horizon Europe<sup>3</sup>, dedicated to food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture, and the environment. Within the “Farm to Fork” initiative—the destination addressing food systems from primary production to consumers—the evolution of budget allocation between 2021–2022 and 2026–2027 clearly shows a shift. In 2026, only one out of sixteen thematic calls for proposals concerns fisheries, focusing on migratory fish, particularly diadromous species. This suggests that marine fisheries risk being reduced to a marginal role. The situation will be similar in 2027, with again only one topic, this time focused on small-scale fisheries and recreational fishing.

Admittedly, fisheries research can also find support through other Horizon Europe funding streams, notably the Ocean Mission<sup>4</sup>. This programme addresses crucial issues, particularly around ecosystem conservation and restoration—objectives we strongly support. However, fisheries are only one sector among many within the blue economy, sometimes even in competition with other

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.association-francaise-halieuque.fr/>

<sup>2</sup>[https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/44106caa-ed7a-42bf-ae57-aaab91778602\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/44106caa-ed7a-42bf-ae57-aaab91778602_en)

<sup>3</sup>Horizon Europe is the European framework programme for research and innovation, the main driver of Europe’s research efforts

<sup>4</sup>[https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe/restore-our-ocean-and-waters_en)

uses, and are less often considered from a “food production” perspective<sup>5</sup>. Care must therefore be taken to ensure that fisheries are not viewed solely through the lens of their negative externalities.

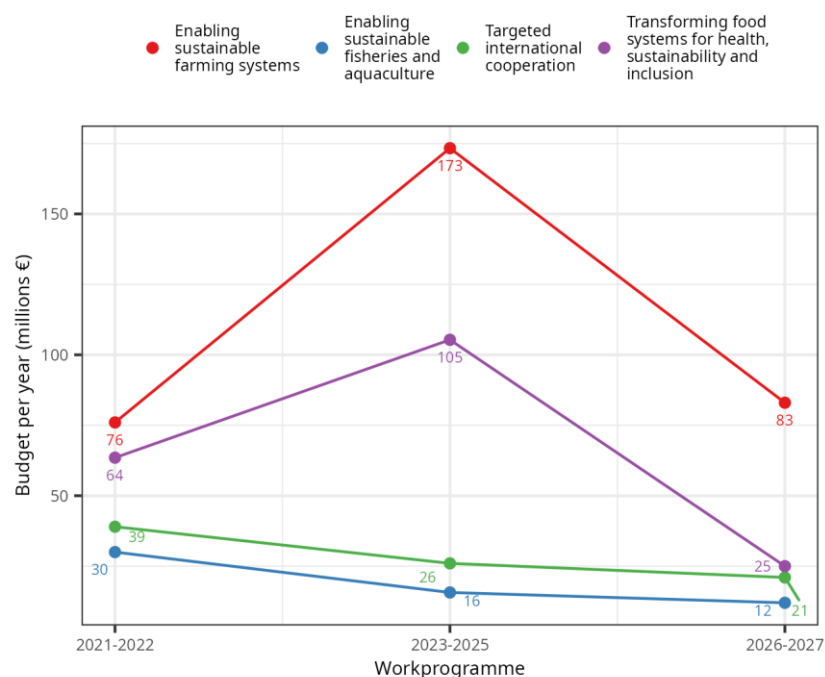


Figure 1 : Average yearly budget allocated to the various themes within Cluster 6 in the work programmes for 2021–2022 (left), 2023–2025 (centre) and 2026–2027 (right). The average budgets were calculated by dividing the total budgets by the duration of the work programme (2 years for the 2021–2022 and 2026–2027 programmes, 3 years for the 2023–2025 programme) to facilitate comparison. The figure indicates the average annual budget per theme and work programme. (source [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/44106caa-ed7a-42bf-ae57-aaab91778602\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/44106caa-ed7a-42bf-ae57-aaab91778602_en), [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/02934842-298b-4226-a965-02be347e5c1c\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/02934842-298b-4226-a965-02be347e5c1c_en), [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a7ea7953-7d22-4d59-b1f7-9c60ff064a10\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a7ea7953-7d22-4d59-b1f7-9c60ff064a10_en), [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2021-2022/wp-9-food-bioeconomy-natural-resources-agriculture-and-environment\\_horizon-2021-2022\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2021-2022/wp-9-food-bioeconomy-natural-resources-agriculture-and-environment_horizon-2021-2022_en.pdf)).

A second cause for concern lies in ongoing negotiations and initial proposals for the European Union’s 2028–2034 budget<sup>6</sup>. Presented as “simpler, harmonised, and more flexible,” this new framework would merge existing funds into larger, integrated instruments. In this context, fisheries and aquaculture could access funding through the European Competitiveness Fund, the National and

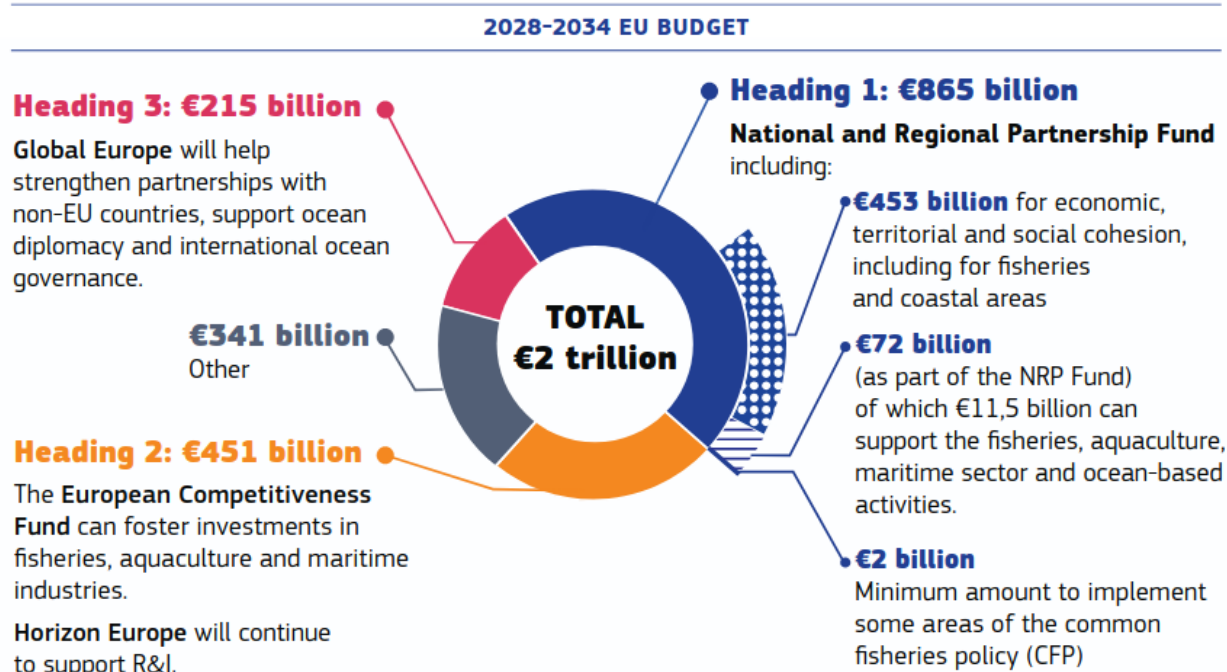
<sup>5</sup>“It is worth noting that in 2026 there will be a call for projects entitled “By fishers, for fishers: co-management of marine and freshwaters ecosystems and resources”

<sup>6</sup>[https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/eu-budget-2028-2034_en)



Regional Partnership Fund (NRPF)—particularly its territorial development and social cohesion component—or the external partnership instrument “Global Europe”<sup>7</sup>.

However, the current European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), which allocated €6.1 billion for 2021–2027 to support sustainable fisheries, aquaculture, and marine resource conservation, would disappear. Only €2 billion would remain earmarked for the sector within the NRPF. Similarly, the fund dedicated to the Data Collection Framework (DCF) would be absorbed into the NRPF. Yet these data are essential, forming the backbone of the scientific advice that underpins the Common Fisheries Policy. National DCF correspondents have already expressed serious concerns<sup>8</sup>.



European Commission. (2025). *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A dynamic EU budget for the priorities of the future – The Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034 (COM/2025/570 final)*. Retrieved from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2025:570:FIN> (on 17/09/2025)

Figure 2 : Presentation of the European Commission’s budget proposal for the period 2028–2034, with a particular focus on funding for the fisheries sector. (source : <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/circabc-ewpp/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/b3e3f9fe-2a10-4117-86eb-ae4d272ee541/download>).

<sup>7</sup>[filename=eu-budget-fisheries-aquaculture-ocean\\_en.pdf](#)

<sup>8</sup>[https://fisheries-rcg.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/ISSG-NCs\\_Future-funding-DCF\\_Safeguarding-the-CFP-backbone.pdf](https://fisheries-rcg.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/ISSG-NCs_Future-funding-DCF_Safeguarding-the-CFP-backbone.pdf)



In summary, while fisheries and aquaculture may theoretically gain access to a broader range of funding sources to address major challenges—such as sustainability, climate change, and competition for maritime space—in practice they will face direct competition from many other sectors and stakeholders. While moving away from overly compartmentalised policies may be necessary, the EU must not overlook fisheries or relegate them to a marginal position.

In this context, the AFH therefore stresses out that the fisheries and aquaculture sector:

- is a **strategic food-producing sector**, generating employment, supporting coastal communities, and contributing significantly to food supply
- faces **major challenges** (sustainable exploitation, climate change, spatial competition, competing uses) and requires support to adapt and transform
- depends on **strong scientific research**, from ocean to plate, to innovate, adapt, and continue contributing to European food security